

ORDER OF BUSINESS

MRS. ROUKEMA. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to take my special order up at this time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New Jersey?

There was no objection.

OUT OF THE MOUTHS OF BABES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mrs. ROUKEMA) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. ROUKEMA. Mr. Speaker, I rise to bring to the attention of our colleagues and our people in the country to the outstanding anti-smoking program that the faculty at the Byrd Elementary School in Glen Rock, New Jersey, is providing for their students in cooperation with the New Jersey Breathes organization.

The highlight of the program was a school-wide assembly that I had the privilege of attending on Monday, March 22d, and during that assembly a 5th grade student, Katherine Sommer, was honored as the winner of a composition contest conducted as part of the anti-smoking effort.

Mr. Speaker, I want to read this winning essay so that my colleagues, their children and their grandchildren can benefit from the direct and lucid way that Katherine Sommer expressed her wisdom on the issue of smoking and young people. My reaction was, "out of the mouths of babes".

Here is her essay. It was entitled "Don't Smoke". Katherine Sommer began this way:

Things can happen. Some things can't be helped. Some things can. Some people die of old age, heart attacks, and many other things, but a lot of people die a long, horrible death. They die of smoking. It could happen to you if you make one bad decision. Think of it this way. If you choose to smoke, you will be doing something really stupid. You could get very sick or even die. That wouldn't be worth it, would it? The worst part is it would be all your own fault!

Mr. Speaker, I want to remind my colleagues that Katherine Sommer was speaking to her classmates.

Some teenagers and young children start smoking for some really silly reasons. Some kids may want to join a popular group at school, and think smoking will make them look older. Some girls think smoking will make them look cool and boys will like them even more. What they do not know is if what happened on the inside of your body happened on the outside, you would look really ugly.

If you think that most kids smoke, you're wrong. The average kid doesn't smoke. And if you're anywhere near average, you won't either. You could really hurt yourself. You could get lung cancer, throat cancer, gum cancer or lip cancer. These are only some of the horrible diseases that you can get from smoking. And think, you could die just from trying to be cool.

Another reason you may start smoking is that a family member or really good friend

may already smoke. You might think that it's harmless. You may think, I'll try one smoke, and if I don't like it I won't have any more. Well, it's not that easy. Smoking is addictive. That means that once you start something, you can't stop. Once you try it, it could be too late.

I do not intend to smoke. You shouldn't either. Don't let anything interfere with your dreams. Just don't try smoking. It's not healthy.

That was Katherine Sommer, 5th grade, winning essay in Glen Rock, New Jersey. Again I want to say to my colleagues, out of the mouths of babes, a message for the ages.

GOVERNMENT PENSION OFFSET REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. JEFFERSON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. JEFFERSON. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to provide this statement regarding the Government Pension Offset Reform legislation that I introduced today.

Pension offset reform is an important issue to me. It is an important issue for my constituents in Louisiana and it is an important issue for many State and local government employees across the Nation.

As many of my colleagues are aware, State and local government employees were excluded from Social Security coverage when the Social Security system was first established in 1935. These employees were later given the option to enroll in the Social Security System, and in the 1960s and the 1970s many public employees opted to join in.

Some local governments chose to remain out of the system. Their employees and spouses planned for their retirement according to the rules in effect. It is estimated that about 4.9 million State and local government employees are not covered by Social Security. Seven States, California, Colorado, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Ohio and Texas, account for over 75 percent of the noncovered payroll.

Many of the State and local government employees that are covered by government pensions are or will be unfairly affected by the pension offset. As Members may be aware, the pension offset was originally enacted in response to the perceived abuses to the Social Security system resulting from the Goldfarb decision.

The Social Security system provides that if a spouse who worked and paid into the Social Security system died, the benefits were to be paid to the surviving spouse as a survivor benefit. Men were required to prove dependency on their spouses before they became eligible for Social Security benefits. There was no such requirement for women.

The Goldfarb decision eliminated the different treatment of men and women.

The Court instead required Social Security to treat men and women equally by paying benefits to either spouse without regard to dependency.

Many of the men who would benefit from the Goldfarb decision were also receiving large government pensions. It was believed that these retirees would bankrupt the system, receiving large government and private pensions in addition to survivor benefits.

To combat this perceived problem, pension offset legislation was enacted in 1977. The legislation provided for a dollar-for-dollar reduction of Social Security benefits to spouses or retiring spouses who received earned benefits from a Federal, State or local retirement system. The pension offset provisions can affect any retiree who receives a civil service pension and Social Security, but primarily affects widows or widowers eligible for survivor benefits.

In 1983, the pension offset was reduced to two-thirds of the public employer survivor benefit. It was believed that one-third of the pension was equivalent to the pension available in the private sector.

The pension offset, aimed at high-paid government employees, also applies to public service employees who generally receive lower pension benefits. These public service employees include secretaries, school cafeteria workers, teachers' aids, and others who receive low wages as government employees. The pension offset as applied to this group is punitive, unfairly harsh and bad policy.

Government pensions were tailored to reduce benefits that were equal to many combined private pension-Social Security policies in the private sector for upper level government workers. However, this was not true for lower income workers, such as employees who work as secretaries, school cafeteria workers, teachers' aids, and others who generally receive lower pension benefits.

To illustrate the harsh impact of the pension offset, consider a widow who retired from the Federal Government and receives a civil service annuity of \$550 monthly. The full widow's benefit is \$385. The current pension offset law reduces the widow's benefit to \$19 a month. Two-thirds of the \$550 civil service annuity is \$367, which is then subtracted from the \$385 widow's benefit, leaving only \$19. The retired worker receives \$569, \$550 plus \$19, per month.

Proponents of the pension offset claim that the offset is justified because survivor benefits were intended to be in lieu of pensions. However, were this logic followed across the board, then people with private pension benefits would be subject to the offset as well. But this is not the case.

While Social Security benefits of spouses or surviving spouses earning